

**Amendments to the Claims:**

1. **(Currently amended)** An apparatus for implementing an automated auction process, the apparatus comprising:

a memory operable to:

store a profile associated with a first user; and

store data regarding a plurality of animated characters;

a processor communicatively coupled to the memory and to a plurality of workstations, wherein a first workstation is associated with a first user and the processor is operable to:

determine a first animated character-based at least in part on the profile associated with the first user;

receive a first bid for an item from a workstation associated with a user;

cause the first workstation to display the first animated character as an animated auctioneer that announces the first bid for the item;

receive a second bid for the item from a workstation associated with another user;

determine that the second bid is a current highest bid for the item; **and**

cause the animated auctioneer to announce the second bid for the item based at least in part on determining that the second bid is the current highest bid for the item;

determine that a subsequent bid for the item has not been received within a first pre-determined time period after announcing the current highest bid;

cause the animated auctioneer to make a first announcement regarding termination of bidding based at least in part on the determination; and

cause the first workstation to display a second animated character as an animated bid spotter that solicits bids from the first user after the first announcement.

2. **(Original)** The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the workstation processor of at least one of the plurality of workstations is adapted to receive product information on the at least one item and to display the product information.

3. **(Original)** The apparatus of claim 2 wherein the product information comprises a description of the at least one item.

4. (Original) The apparatus of claim 2 wherein the product information comprises a photograph of the at least one item.

5. (Original) The apparatus of claim 2 wherein the product information comprises a video presentation of the at least one item.

6. (Original) The apparatus of claim 2 wherein the product information comprises the number of units available for sale of the at least one item.

7. (Original) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the workstation processor of at least one of the plurality of workstations is adapted to receive sale information on the at least one item.

8. (Original) The apparatus of claim 7 wherein the sale information comprises a reserve price for the at least one item.

9. (Original) The apparatus of claim 7 wherein the sale information comprises at least one of the group of parameters consisting of a preferred auction duration and a preferred auction commencement time.

10. (Original) The apparatus of claim 7 wherein the sale information comprises a preferred method of payment.

11. (Original) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the server processor is adapted to conduct a search for an item related to the at least one item and display search results on the workstation display of at least one of the plurality of workstations.

12. (Original) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the server processor is adapted to conduct a search for an item related to items in which a user has demonstrated interest and display search results on the workstation display of at least one of the plurality of workstations.

13. (Original) The apparatus of claim 12 wherein the server processor is adapted to allow the user to enter an auction on the related item.

14. (Original) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the server processor is adapted to determine an auction commencement time and a minimum acceptable opening bid for the at least one item.

15. (Original) The apparatus of claim 14 wherein the pre-determined time period may be calculated based on at least one of the group of parameters consisting of the nature of the at least one item, the expected selling price of the at least one item, and the minimum acceptable opening bid.

16. (Original) The apparatus of claim 14 wherein the workstation processor of at least one of the plurality of workstations is adapted to display the auction commencement time and the minimum acceptable opening bid.

17. (Original) The apparatus of claim 16 wherein the animated auctioneer is adapted to announce the minimum acceptable opening bid at the auction commencement time.

18. (Original) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the server processor is adapted to select the animated auctioneer from a set of genre-based characters.

19. (Currently amended) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the processor is further operable to:

determine a second animated character, from the plurality of animated characters, based at least in part on the profile associated with the first user; and

cause the first workstation to display the second animated character as ~~an—the~~ the animated bid spotter that announces, during the auction, at least one message for soliciting bids from the first user.

20. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein:
- a second workstation is associated with a second user;
- the memory is further operable to store a profile associated with the second user; and
- the processor is further operable to:
- determine a second animated character, from the plurality of animated characters, based at least in part on the profile associated with the second user; and
- cause the second workstation to display the second animated character as an animated auctioneer that announces the current highest bid.

21. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 19 wherein the animated bid spotter seeks confirmation from the first user for a bid placed by the first user.

22. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 21 wherein the animated bid spotter announces to the first user the bid placed by the first user.

23. (Original) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the workstation processor of at least one of the plurality of workstations is operative with the workstation program to display a first animated auction attendant that is adapted to welcome a potential bidder to the auction process.

24. (Original) The apparatus of claim 23 wherein the server processor is adapted to select the first animated auction attendant from a set of genre-based characters.

25. (Original) The apparatus of claim 23 wherein the workstation processor of at least one of the plurality of workstations is operative with the workstation program to display a second animated auction attendant to a winning bidder.

26. (Original) The apparatus of claim 25 wherein the server processor is adapted to select the second animated auction attendant from a set of genre-based characters.

27. (Original) The apparatus of claim 25 wherein the second animated auction attendant is adapted to instruct the winning bidder to choose a method of payment for the at least one item.

28. **(Original)** The apparatus of claim 27 wherein the second animated auction attendant is adapted to ask the winning bidder to confirm the chosen method of payment.

29. **(Original)** The apparatus of claim 25 wherein the server storage device is adapted to store preferred payment and shipping information pertaining to the winning bidder, the second animated auction attendant being adapted to display and ask the winning bidder to confirm the preferred payment and shipping information.

30. **(Original)** The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the bids received on the at least one item comprise advance bids.

31. **(Original)** The apparatus of claim 1 wherein at least one of the bids received on the at least one item comprises a Smart Bid.

32. **(Original)** The apparatus of claim 31 wherein the Smart Bid is calculated by the server processor to be higher than the sum of a minimum acceptable incremental bid and the current bid in order to insure that a bidder is given the opportunity to place a bid corresponding to the maximum amount the bidder is willing to place.

33. **(Original)** The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the pre-determined time period may be updated based on at least one of the group of parameters consisting of the pre-determined time period, the current bid, and the number of received bids.

34. **(Previously Presented)** The apparatus of claim 1 wherein each of the plurality of animated characters represents a respective celebrity.

35. **(Previously Presented)** The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the profile associated with the first user comprises one or more buyer preferences associated with the first user.

36. **(Cancelled)**

37. **(Currently amended)** The apparatus of claim 1 the processor further operable to:

make a first determination that a subsequent bid for the item has not been received within a first pre-determined time period after announcing the current highest bid;

cause the animated auctioneer to make a first announcement regarding termination of bidding based at least in part on the first determination;

make a second determination that a subsequent bid for the item has not been received within a second pre-determined time period after the first announcement; and

cause the animated auctioneer to make a second announcement regarding termination of bidding based at least in part on the second determination.

38. **(Previously Presented)** The apparatus of claim 37 wherein the second pre-determined time period is calculated based on the first pre-determined time period.

39. **(Previously presented)** The apparatus of claim 37 wherein the second pre-determined time period is equal to the first pre-determined time period.

40. **(Previously presented)** The apparatus of claim 37 the processor further operable to:

make a third determination that a subsequent bid for the item has not been received within a third pre-determined time period after the second announcement; and

cause the animated auctioneer to make a third announcement regarding termination of bidding based at least in part on the third determination.

41. **(Previously Presented)** The apparatus of claim 36 wherein the first announcement comprises a "Last Chance to Bid" announcement.

42. **(Previously Presented)** The apparatus of claim 36 wherein the first announcement comprises a "Going Once" announcement.

43. **(Original)** The apparatus of claim 37 wherein the second announcement comprises a "Going Twice" announcement.

44. **(Original)** The apparatus of claim 37 wherein the second announcement comprises a "Sold" announcement.

45. **(Previously Presented)** The apparatus of claim 40 wherein the third announcement comprises a "Sold" announcement.

46. **(Previously Presented)** The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the processor and the plurality of workstations are connected through the Internet.

47. (Currently amended) A method for implementing an automated auction process, the method comprising:

storing a profile associated with a first user;

storing data regarding a plurality of animated characters;

causing a plurality of workstations to display information regarding at least one item, wherein a first workstation is associated with the first user;

determining a first animated character-based-at-least-in-part-on-the-profile-associated-with-the-first-user;

receiving, from at least one workstation associated with a user, a first bid on the at least one item from;

causing the first workstation to display the first animated character as an animated auctioneer that announces the first bid for the at least one item;

receiving, from at least one workstation associated with another user, a second bid on the at least one item;

determining that the second bid is a current highest bid on the at least one item based at least in part on the at least one bid; and

causing the animated auctioneer to announce the second bid for the at least one item based at least in part on determining that the second bid is a current highest bid for the at least one item;

determining that a subsequent bid is not received from at least one workstation within a first pre-determined time period after announcing the current highest bid;

causing the animated auctioneer to make a first announcement regarding termination of bidding based at least in part on the determination; and

causing the first workstation to display a second animated character as an animated bid spotter that solicits one or more bids on the at least one item after the first announcement.

48. (Original) The method of claim 47 wherein the displaying product information relating to the at least one item comprises displaying a description of the at least one item.

49. (Original) The method of claim 47 wherein the displaying product information relating to the at least one item comprises displaying a photograph of the at least one item.

50. (Original) The method of claim 47 wherein the displaying product information relating to the at least one item comprises displaying a video presentation of the at least one item.

51. (Original) The method of claim 47 wherein the displaying product information relating to the at least one item comprises displaying the number of units available for sale of the at least one item.

52. (Original) The method of claim 47 further comprising receiving sale information on the at least one item prior to the displaying the animated auctioneer.

53. (Original) The method of claim 52 wherein the receiving sale information on the at least one item comprises receiving a reserve price for the at least one item.

54. (Original) The method of claim 52 wherein the receiving sale information on the at least one item comprises receiving at least one of the group of parameters consisting of a preferred auction duration and a preferred auction commencement time.

55. (Original) The method of claim 52 wherein the receiving sale information on the at least one item comprises receiving a preferred method of payment.

56. (Original) The method of claim 47 further comprising conducting a search for an item related to the at least one item and displaying search results relating to the search.

57. (Original) The method of claim 47 further comprising conducting a search for an item related to items in which a user has demonstrated interest and displaying search results relating to the search.

58. (Original) The method of claim 57 further comprising allowing the user to enter an auction on the related item.

59. (Original) The method of claim 47 further comprising setting an auction commencement time for the at least one item prior to the displaying the animated auctioneer.

60. (Original) The method of claim 47 further comprising setting a minimum acceptable opening bid for the at least one item prior to the displaying the animated auctioneer.

61. (Original) The method of claim 47 further comprising setting a minimum acceptable incremental bid for the at least one item.

62. (Original) The method of claim 60 wherein the animated auctioneer announcing the start of the auction process comprises the animated auctioneer announcing the minimum acceptable opening bid.

63. (Original) The method of claim 61 wherein the animated auctioneer announcing the start of the auction process comprises the animated auctioneer announcing the minimum acceptable incremental bid.

64. (Original) The method of claim 47 wherein the displaying an animated auctioneer on the interactive screen comprises selecting the animated auctioneer from a set of genre-based characters.

65. (Original) The method of claim 47 wherein the receiving at least one bid on the at least one item comprises receiving an advance bid on the at least one item.

66. (Original) The method of claim 47 wherein the receiving at least one bid on the at least one item comprises receiving a Smart Bid on the at least one item.

67. (Original) The method of claim 66 wherein the receiving the Smart Bid comprises calculating the at least one bid to be higher than the sum of a minimum acceptable incremental bid and the current bid in order to insure that a bidder is given the opportunity to place a bid corresponding to the maximum amount the bidder is willing to place.

68. (Original) The method of claim 61 wherein the receiving at least one bid on the at least one item comprises receiving a plurality of bids on the at least one item during the pre-determined time period.

69. (Original) The method of claim 68 wherein the determining a current bid on the at least one item comprises comparing each of the plurality of bids on the at least one item with the sum of the minimum acceptable incremental bid and a most recent current bid.

70. (Original) The method of claim 69 wherein the determining a current bid on the at least one item further comprises prioritizing the plurality of bids on the at least one item based on the time each of the plurality of bids is received.

71. (Original) The method of claim 70 wherein the determining a current bid on the at least one item further comprises determining an updated highest bid among the prioritized plurality of bids on the at least one item.

72. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 47 wherein the at least one workstation is associated with a particular user, and further comprising allowing the particular user to retract the at least one bid within a pre-determined time period after the announcement of the current bid.

73. (Currently amended) The method of claim 47 further comprising:  
determining a second animated character, from the plurality of animated characters, based at least in part on the profile associated with the first user; and  
causing the first workstation to display the second animated character as ~~an—the~~ the animated bid spotter that solicits bids on the at least one item from the first user.

74. (Previously presented) The method of claim 47 wherein a second workstation is associated with a second user, the method further comprising:  
storing a profile associated with the second user;  
determining a second animated character, from the plurality of animated characters, based at least in part on the profile associated with the second user; and

causing the second workstation to display the second animated character as an animated auctioneer that announces the current highest bid.

75. (Previously presented) The method of claim 73 wherein the animated bid spotter seeks confirmation from the first user for a bid placed by the first user.

76. (Previously presented) The method of claim 75 wherein the animated bid spotter announces to the first user the bid placed by the first user.

77. (Original) The method of claim 47 wherein the interactive screen is a first interactive screen, the method further comprising displaying a first animated auction attendant on a second interactive screen, the first animated auction attendant for welcoming a potential bidder to the automated auction process.

78. (Original) The method of claim 77 wherein the displaying a first animated auction attendant comprises selecting the first animated auction attendant from a set of genre-based characters.

79. (Original) The method of claim 77 further comprising displaying a second animated auction attendant on a third interactive screen to a winning bidder.

80. (Original) The method of claim 79 wherein the displaying a second animated auction attendant comprises selecting the second animated auction attendant from a set of genre-based characters.

81. (Original) The method of claim 79 wherein the displaying a second animated auction attendant comprises displaying a second animated auction attendant for instructing the winning bidder to choose a method of payment for the at least one item.

82. (Original) The method of claim 81 wherein the displaying a second animated auction attendant further comprises displaying the second animated auction attendant for asking the winning bidder to confirm the chosen method of payment for the at least one item.

83. **(Original)** The method of claim 79 further comprising storing a preferred method of payment pertaining to the winning bidder, the displaying a second animated auction attendant further comprises displaying the second animated auction attendant for asking the winning bidder to confirm the preferred method of payment for the at least one item.

84. **(Original)** The method of claim 60 wherein the setting a pre-determined time period comprises calculating the pre-determined time period based on at least one of the group of parameters consisting of the nature of the at least one item, the expected selling price of the at least one item, and the minimum acceptable opening bid.

85. **(Original)** The method of claim 68 wherein the setting a pre-determined time period comprises updating the pre-determined time period based on at least one of the group of parameters consisting of the predetermined time period, the current bid, and the number of the plurality of bids received on the at least one item.

86. **(Previously Presented)** The method of claim 47 wherein each of the plurality of animated characters represents a respective celebrity.

87. **(Previously Presented)** The method of claim 47 wherein the profile associated with the first user comprises one or more buyer preferences associated with the first user.

88. **(Cancelled)**

89. (Currently amended) The method of claim 47, further comprising:
- ~~making a first determination that a subsequent bid is not received from at least one workstation within a first pre-determined time period after announcing the current highest bid;~~
- ~~causing the animated auctioneer to make a first announcement regarding termination of bidding based at least in part on the first determination;~~
- making a second determination that a subsequent bid is not received from at least one workstation within a second pre-determined time period after the first announcement; and
- causing the animated auctioneer to make a second announcement regarding termination of bidding based at least in part on the second determination.

90. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 89 wherein the second pre-determined time period is calculated based on the first predetermined time period.

91. (Previously presented) The method of claim 89 wherein the second pre-determined time period is equal to the first pre-determined time period.

92. (Previously presented) The method of claim 89 further comprising:

making a third determination that a subsequent bid is not received within a third pre-determined time period after the second announcement; and

causing the animated auctioneer to make a third announcement regarding termination of bidding based at least in part on the third determination.

93. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 88 wherein the animated auctioneer making the first announcement comprises the animated auctioneer announcing "Last Chance to Bid".

94. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 88 wherein the animated auctioneer making the first announcement comprises the animated auctioneer announcing "Going Once".

95. **(Previously Presented)** The method of claim 89 wherein the animated auctioneer making the second announcement comprises the animated auctioneer announcing "Going Twice".

96. **(Previously Presented)** The method of claim 89 wherein the animated auctioneer making the second announcement comprises the animated auctioneer announcing "Sold".

97. **(Previously Presented)** The method of claim 92 wherein the animated auctioneer making the third announcement comprises the animated auctioneer announcing "Sold".

98. **(Previously Presented)** The method of claim 47 further comprising causing the first workstation to prompt the first user for a username and a password.

99. **(Original)** The method of claim 52 further comprising prompting a user intending to sell the at least one item for a username and a password prior to the receiving sale information on the at least one item.

100. **(Previously Presented)** The method of claim 47 wherein the winning bid is determined by a server that is communicatively coupled to the plurality of workstations via one or more networks comprising the Internet.